

## Jefferson Quick, Timely Reads

### *Mystics for Skeptics* *Dalai Lama: A Mystic and Saint*

By: Reverend Charles Brock

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The 14th Dalai Lama was born in Taktser, Qinghai, Republic of China. He was selected as the tulku of the 13th Dalai Lama in 1937 and formally recognized as the 14th Dalai Lama in a public declaration near the town of Bumchen in 1939. His enthronement ceremony as the Dalai Lama was held in Lhasa in 1940 and he eventually assumed full political duties at the age of 15, after the People's Republic of China's occupation of Tibet.

During the 1959 Tibetan uprising, the Dalai Lama fled to India, where he is a refugee. He is an expert in religion, politics of Tibet, environment, economics, women's rights, nonviolence, interfaith dialogue, physics, astronomy, Buddhism and science, reproductive health and sexuality, and Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhist teachings. He was a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.[1]

What sort of mystic is he? He follows the classic Buddhist noble truths described in the chapter on *Buddha*. From his own words: “To generate the type of love and compassion that motivates you to seek buddhahood, not for yourself but for the sake of others, first you must confront suffering by identifying its types. This is the first noble truth. From the time we are born to the time we die we suffer mental and physical pain, the suffering of change, and pervasive suffering of uncontrolled conditioning. [*Dukkha* (*suffering*) can be translated as stress, anxiety, dissatisfaction as well]. The second and third noble truths lead us to understand the causes of suffering and whether or not those causes can be removed. The fundamental cause of suffering is ignorance – the mistaken apprehension that living beings and objects inherently exist.”

The following goes against most everything in Western philosophy and religion: “We all have a valid, proper sense of self, or “I,” but then we additionally have a misconception of that “I” as inherently existing. Under the sway of this delusion, we view the self as existing under its own power, established by way of its own nature, able to set itself up ... The fact that you cannot find [a separate “I”] means that those phenomena do not exist under their own power; they are not self-established.”

“Nowadays I always meditate on emptiness in the morning and bring that experience into the day's activities. Just thinking or saying “I,” as in “I will do such and such,” will often trigger the feeling. But still I cannot claim full understanding of emptiness.”

“A wise consciousness, grounded in reality, understands that living beings and other phenomena – minds, bodies, buildings, and so forth – do not inherently exist. This is the wisdom of emptiness. ... Remove the ignorance that misconceives phenomena to inherently exist and you prevent the generation of afflictive emotions like lust and hatred. Thus, in turn, suffering can also be removed. In addition, the wisdom of emptiness must be accompanied by a motivation of deep concern for others (and by the compassionate deeds it inspires) before it can remove the obstructions to omniscience, which are the predispositions for the false appearance of phenomena – even to sense consciousness – as if they inherently exist.”

“Buddhists hold that there is no such solid self. For Buddhists, the main topic of the training in wisdom is emptiness, or selflessness, which means the absence of a permanent, unitary and independent self or, more subtly, the absence of inherent existence either in living beings or in other phenomena.”

“Let us return to the central point: All of us have a sense of “I” but we need to realize that it is only designated in dependence upon mind and body. The selflessness that Buddhists speak of refers to the absence of a self that is permanent, partless, and independent, or, more subtly, it can refer to the absence of inherent existence of any phenomenon. However, Buddhists do value the existence of a self that changes from moment to moment, designated in dependence upon the continuum of mind and body. All of us validly have this sense of “I.”

When Buddhists speak of the doctrine of selflessness, we are not referring to the nonexistence of this self. With this “I,” all of us rightfully want happiness and do not want suffering. It is when we exaggerate our sense of ourselves and other phenomena to mean something inherently existent that we get drawn into many, many problems.”[2]

“Friends and relatives are not permanent. They change from moment to moment. You destroy the possibility of finding the unchanging state of liberation as you are attached to them. Hence, our own attachment creates and contributes to the development of attachment in others.”[3] Instead, “we [seek and] experience the eternal stillness,

making us act in the freest manner possible.”[4] But if you are full of anger, jealousy, attachment, you will never be happy.

Unattachment leads to non-violence, but it is not passive. He takes tough stands for justice.[5] “Effort should be steady, like a stream of running water.” It is joyful to practice Dharma.[6]

“The person who is constantly working for others, deep down, is free of anxiety and calm...The body becomes a conflict-free zone because there is no more conflict and no external circumstances can be upsetting” with the right mindfulness of emptiness.[7]

The Dalai Lama also emphasizes the Hindu and Buddhist concept of Oneness and its effect on all life. “Everybody wants a happy life – and our individual happy life depends on a happy humanity. So we have to think about humanity, discover a sense of oneness of all seven billion human beings.”[8] This helps us to suffer with others as well. “This recognition of our interdependence begins to soften our rigid sense of self, the boundaries that we are to ourselves, the less defensive and reactive we will be toward others.” We are in this together.

The Dalai Lama agrees with the Western view of forgiveness and transference, based on Day of Atonement rites and a theology of the Cross (Leviticus 16 and Romans 5), when he speaks about meditation. “As you inhale, imagine the pain being drawn from their body and dissolving when it encounters the warmth and bright light of your compassionate heart ... If the idea of taking in others’ suffering is concerning or unsettling, you can imagine their suffering dissolving into a bright orb of light in front of you that is radiating out from your compassionate heart.”[9]

And at the end of our time on earth, “After our deaths, we do not disappear, we take rebirth.”[10] The Dalai Lama meditates for hours each day rising at 3 am, travels extensively, meets with world political and religious leaders, speaks publicly to millions, and has a massive following inside and outside Tibetan Buddhism. He is a mystic and saint in our day.

## References

[1] *14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama*, Wikipedia (altered)

[2] Dalai Lama, *Emptiness and Existence*, from *How to Practice: The Way to a Meaningful Life*, by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Translated and edited by Jeffrey Hopkins, <http://www.shambhalasun.com/>

[3] Dalai Lama, *Little Book of Mysticism – The Essential Teachings*, Hampton Roads Publishing Co, Virginia, 2017, #55

[4] Renuka Singh, *Introduction to the Dalai Lama’s Little Book of Mysticism* op cit p 8

[5] Ibid *Little Book of Mysticism* #23, 25

[6] Ibid #52

[7] Ibid #79

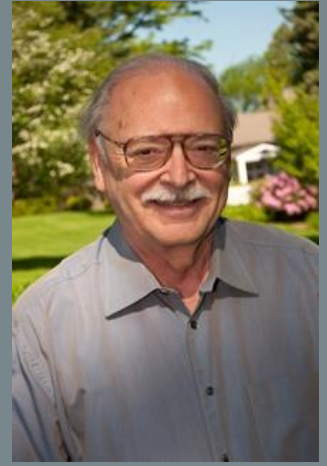
[8] Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu with Douglas Abrams, *Joy – Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*, Avery NY, 2016, p 73

[9] Ibid p 326

[10] Ibid #91

Photo from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_14th\\_Dalal\\_Lama\\_as\\_a\\_child\\_1940s.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_14th_Dalal_Lama_as_a_child_1940s.jpg)

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